



March 15, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith Jr.  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – HB 271: Public Safety - Law Enforcement Diversion Programs

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS and WPS support House Bill 271: Public Safety - Law Enforcement Diversion Programs (HB 271) as Maryland desperately needs to develop effective and collaborative partnerships between law enforcement and mental health providers that divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system and towards treatment.

Law enforcement officers are often the first called to deal with persons suffering mental health emergencies. Too often, persons with mental illness have been killed or seriously injured during attempts to manage their crises. HB 271 takes a meaningful step to avoid such outcomes by first ensuring that law enforcement officers are better trained to respond to such daily incidents where the underlying issue is related to an individual's mental health, behavioral health, and/or substance abuse and not his/her criminal intent. Further, the bill wisely "authorize[s] law enforcement agencies to develop and implement collaborative law enforcement diversion programs in Maryland that offer immediate pathways to behavioral health services and other services as an alternative to traditional case processing and involvement in the criminal justice system[.]" Simply criminalizing mental illness benefits neither the individual nor society as history has shown. Thus, a multi-layered approach proposed in HB 271, where well-trained officers divert those with mental health issues to meaningful treatment, will result in a safer, healthier Maryland.

Therefore, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report on HB 271. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr at [tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com](mailto:tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society  
Joint Legislative Committee